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FOSTER PARENTS' HANDBOOK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Arlene Hooker Fay, renowned western artist, has long had a personal interest in foster parenting. Her parents, William and Esther Hooker, became foster parents in October of 1960. In 1975 her mother died but her father continues as a foster parent now for adults.

When asked if she would contribute her artistic talents to illustrate this printing of the foster parent manual, Arlene was thrilled. She had always wanted the opportunity to give something of herself to the foster care program.

Arlene says "it is because I love people that I paint them." Most of her paintings depict children and mothers because, "they are available and I feel I know something about them." Arlene's role as mother of her three children receives priority over her artistic career. Arlene states "paintings without people on them may be beautiful, even magnificent but they don't have the same meaning to me."

Her attention to the details of Indian dress and her emphatic rendering of the contemporary Indians' facial expressions show clearly her love for these people. Arlene expressed, "how can you put every bit of feeling you have into painting, if you aren't in love with your subject?"

"Their (Indians) appearance, philosophies, heritage, attitudes and dress seemed so much more interesting to me. I always had the feeling it was they who should be teaching us."¹

In August, 1978, Arlene was awarded Best of Show for Mixed Media at the Western Rendezvous in Helena; the judges' award for excellence at the Ellensburg, Washington show in 1980 and 1982; and the committee award at the M O N A C Show in Spokane, Washington in 1980.

Thank you Arlene for sharing your beautiful and inspirational paintings with the foster parents of Montana.

¹ Art West
Spring 1979 Vol. 11, Issue 3
Kathe McGehee

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DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES



TED SCHWINDEN, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 4210

STATE OF MONTANA

HELENA, MONTANA 59604

Dear Foster Parents:

We sincerely appreciate your time and effort, so freely given to our Department and other child placing agencies and, of more importance, your assistance to those children invested to your care and to their families.

It is with respect, gratitude, and affection that this handbook is dedicated to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Norma Harris".

Norma Harris, Administrator
Community Services Division

IF A CHILD

"If a child lives with criticism
He learns to condemn

If a child lives with hostility
He learns to fight

If a child lives with ridicule
He learns to be shy

If a child lives with jealousy
He learns to feel guilty

If a child lives with tolerance
He learns to be patient

If a child lives with encouragement
He learns confidence

If a child lives with fairness
He learns justice

If a child lives with praise
He learns to appreciate

If a child lives with security
He learns to have faith

If a child lives with approval
He learns to like himself

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship
He learns to find love in the world."

Dorothy Law Nolte

NATIONAL FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION


CODE OF ETHICS

Each foster parent has an obligation to maintain and improve the practice of fostering constantly; to examine, use, and increase the knowledge upon which fostering is based; and to perform the service of fostering with integrity and competence.

Principles:

1. I regard as my primary obligation the welfare of the child served.
2. I shall work objectively with the agency in effecting the plan for the child in my care.
3. I hold myself responsible for the quality and extent of the services I perform.
4. I accept the reluctance of the child to discuss his or her past.
5. I shall keep confidential from the community information pertaining to any child placed in my home.
6. I treat with respect the findings, views and actions of fellow foster parents, and use appropriate channels, such as foster parent organization, to express my opinions.
7. I shall take advantage of available opportunities for education and training designed to upgrade my performance as a foster parent.
8. I respect the worth of all individuals regardless of race, religion, sex or national ancestry in my capacity as a foster parent.
9. I accept the responsibility to work toward assuring that ethical standards are adhered to by any individual or organization providing foster care services.
10. I shall distinguish clearly in public between my statements and actions as an individual, and as a representative of a foster parent organization.
11. I accept responsibility for working toward the creation and maintenance of conditions within the field of foster care that enable foster parents to uphold the principles of this code.

WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?



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WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster family care is the provision of a substitute family for a planned period of time for a child who has to be separated from his biological or legal parents. Social work and other helping services needed by the child, his parents, and the foster parents are the added components of foster family care.

The primary aim of all child welfare services is to preserve and strengthen the child's own home whenever possible. Sometimes biological parents or other responsible persons cannot meet a child's basic needs for care, protection and love. For most children, life in a family foster home such as yours can come closer to normal family living than any other type of temporary placement.

Family foster care should be utilized for the majority of children who need placement who can participate in family life, attend community schools, and live in the community without danger to themselves or others.

In order to help the child and his family, total foster care services include:

1. Selection of a suitable family foster home for the child.
2. Helping biological parents to change conditions in their homes so that the child can again live with them. In addition to strengthening parental capabilities, this involvement with the biological parents improves their ability to be supportive to their child during placement.
3. Giving direct help to the child by offering various services in addition to what the biological parents and foster parents can give. This would include planning with foster parents on behalf of the child for any necessary psychiatric and medical treatment and training.
4. Providing direction and support to the foster parents to enable them to provide quality substitute care.

Family foster care requires teamwork amongst foster parents, biological parents, and the social service agency.

WHY DO CHILDREN NEED FOSTER CARE?

WHY DO CHILDREN NEED FOSTER CARE?

Most children enter foster care as a result of unstable conditions in their own homes. The most frequent of these factors are: physical or mental illness of parents, emotional problems of the children themselves, severe neglect or abuse, abandonment, or other family problems with which the biological parents feel they are unable to cope. The decision that a child can be maintained in his own home, or that placement is necessary, should be determined by the ability of the parents to deal with their problems, and their capacity to utilize help.

None of the problems cited as reasons for placement should in itself be considered sufficient cause for placement. Many problems may be found among the families of children needing foster family care, and occasionally among the children themselves. A single cause or circumstance is in and of itself rarely responsible for parental inability to provide adequate care for the child.

How Is The Placement Decision Made?

The decision to place or not to place is derived from the information gathered by the social worker. One of the main decision points is whether the family can accept the therapeutic involvement of the social worker. Sometimes, for varying reasons, no amount of assistance offered can improve living conditions, on a day-to-day basis, to the point of adequacy for children. In these cases, either through cooperation of the parents or by court order, the child may be removed from his home.

Before a decision is made to obtain substitute care out of his home for a child, all factors in the family situation must be carefully weighed and the pro's and con's of separating the family unit must be taken into consideration. Separating a family sets up three related responses. First, the parents feel a sense of failure and loss and they fear the changes that may be brought about by the loss. Second, the children experience fear or loss of their home and family and fear of the unknown future. Third, the reactions of persons outside the family, relatives, friends, members of the community are often very negative. The child's anxiety about being separated from his family usually includes feelings of helplessness, rage, distrust and worthlessness, all of which inevitably reflect on his self-concept.



For the parent, the fear of losing his child usually includes the fear of losing his child's love. This fear is not totally unrealistic since the parent has failed the child in the parental role and probably has experienced more than the usual negative feelings between himself and the child. Also the parents wish and need to be rid of the stress of the child's care usually produces guilt and a feeling

of failure. In addition, the parents experience anxiety about the unknown future of their life without the child and the fear of never being able to reunite the family. Removal of a child from his biological family is a serious matter and should always occur with a plan in mind for both the child and his family.

BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services is legally responsible for providing foster homes for children. The responsibility for recruitment and the foster home study has been delegated to the individual county and district SRS offices. To recruit foster homes, the Department enlists the cooperation and aid of trained foster parents. Licensed private child placing agencies also do recruitment of foster homes and the foster home study.

FOSTER HOME STUDY

There will be at least one home visit. It is important that the worker talk with you in your own home as a family and also individually to get to know you and to allow each person to discuss his or her own feelings and questions about his or her involvement in providing foster care.

It is extremely important for you as a family to discuss all the adjustments that will have to be made if a new child joins your family. Your own children should be helped to discuss and work through some of the thoughts they have on how this will affect them personally, sharing their home, their parents and, their personal possessions.

You will be asked to discuss personal issues related to your ability to foster parent (for example, why you want to be a foster parent, parenting style, methods of discipline, significant life experiences, expectations and beliefs about biological parents).

After the visits and discussions have been completed, the foster home study should result in:

1. An understanding by the social worker of the strengths and weaknesses of the family making application.
2. A greater understanding on the part of all concerned as to what the family can give to the foster child for his physical, emotional and social growth.
3. An evaluation of whether the family can share responsibility for the physical and emotional care of the child with the worker and the child's own parents or agency.
4. Knowledge of the family's income and the physical facilities of the home for caring for a child.
5. Some preparation or orientation of the family toward caring for a particular type of child or for recognizing their inability to do so.

When your study has been completed, a decision will be made as to whether or not you will be licensed as foster parents by the agency. This does not mean that you have passed or failed any "examination". Hopefully, it means that you and the agency made a joint decision in the best interest of your own family and a child that needs care.

If the decision is to place children with you for care, there should be a decision about the number and age range (infants, preschool, school age, adolescents, etc.) of children which you feel most comfortable with. There should be an understanding about what problems you can accept and work with such as retardation, physical handicaps, emotional disturbances, etc.

There is no guarantee of a placement. You have offered your home and yourself as a potential resource for a child.

RELICENSURE

Foster care licenses are granted for a period of one year. Annually there must be an evaluation of your foster care experience. This will be a time for you to sit down with your social worker and discuss any progress or problems. This discussion should help you recognize your strengths and use them to a greater advantage and also realize some of your weaknesses and constructively determine a way to work at improving them. Also, it is a special time when you can raise questions and criticisms with the worker, although this can be done any time. This is a good time to discuss any needs you feel you have for education or training that would enable you to perform your role as a foster parent more adequately. This is a good opportunity to talk with the worker about the training that you have received during the past year. The re-evaluation will involve the entire family.

FOSTER PARENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Continuing efforts are being made to provide education and growth producing experiences for foster parents. These efforts are based on one primary objective - the improvement of services to children who must live outside their own families.

Foster parenting is a unique child-rearing role that requires normal parenting skills plus additional skills related to the complexity of the foster care system itself. Dealing with and understanding the special problems involved in parenting someone else's children demands a special perspective and special knowledge of children and family life.

The needs of children placed in foster care are changing. Many of the children placed have been abused and neglected and/or come from homes experiencing great difficulties. Thus the children may suffer from emotional and behavioral problems that demand some additional knowledge and skill on the part of the foster parents.

Educational opportunities and practical skill training for foster parents are many and varied. Your county and/or area may provide programs in conjunction with the foster parent association meetings, or may conduct separate sessions on special topics. With your participation and assistance these programs can be developed and expanded.

Foster parent education and skill training is fast becoming a necessary part of meeting more adequately the changing needs of children coming into foster care.

Discuss with your social worker what opportunities are available to you to fulfill your educational and skill training requirements, such as:

1. separation and grieving,
2. alternatives to physical discipline and a definition of the department policy on discipline,
3. department and foster parent's roles and responsibilities,
4. biological family rights and responsibilities,
5. how and why children get into foster care,
6. types and behaviors of children in care,
7. placement process,
8. confidentiality,
9. sexual abuse,
10. drugs and alcohol abuse, and
11. foster parent insurance.

THE PLACEMENT PROCEDURE

THE PLACEMENT PROCEDURE

PREPARATION FOR PLACEMENT

Selection of the appropriate foster home for a foster child is one of the most crucial steps in the entire placement procedure.

Below are a few of the factors the social worker will take into consideration:

--The wishes of the biological parents and the child.

--Lifestyle of the foster family - will the child be more comfortable in a family that lives an ordered, scheduled life, or one that is less structured?

--Number and ages of other children-should the foster child be oldest or youngest? Will he do better as an only child, or with many foster brothers and sisters?

--Needs of other children in the foster home - will this child be too competitive for other foster children? Will he be overshadowed by them? Are his characteristics compatible with other children in the home?



--Skills of foster parents - have these parents shown skill or interest in dealing with the type of problems this youngster has?

--Geography - should the child stay in the same neighborhood? Would it be better to place him on a farm or in the city?

--Religion - what have the child's religious experiences been? What are the biological family and child's wishes regarding religious participation and do these coincide with foster family's expectations?

--Special resources such as educational facilities in the area.

--Interests and hobbies - do these parents have a lifestyle and environment that would lend itself to this youngster's interests?

Perhaps the most important thing to remember during the placement of any child in your home is that a placement can be successful only if the child, parents, foster parents and social worker are working together toward the same goals. This means that every person involved should be aware of and involved in planning and decision making regarding that placement.

Preparation for placement varies with each child and should be adapted to his age, experience, individual needs, personality, and circumstances necessitating placement, as well as any special problems presented by the prospect of placement.

In emergency situations, time, circumstances and lack of information may eliminate some of the pre-placement steps mentioned above.



PRE-PLACEMENT VISITS

If at all possible, pre-placement visits should take place between the child, the child's parents and the foster parents. This helps the child move toward actual placement. It is important that a child feels he has the permission of his parents to live with someone else for awhile. Visits help. The nature of the visits as to time, place, number of visits and persons involved, will depend upon the particular circumstances in each case. All of these arrangements will be worked out to meet the needs of all persons involved.

Pre-placement visits lessen the shock of the move for the child and allow you and your family to have more knowledge of the child when he

comes to stay. It is usually best to have only the immediate foster family members in the home at the time of the pre-placement visits. Pictures of family members who could not be at home are helpful. The main purpose is to help the child become more familiar with you and you with him.

If after meeting the child you have questions about taking him into your home, you should let the social worker know as soon as possible. Your feelings about the child, warm feelings, as well as questionable feelings, should be shared with the social worker after the visit(s). The social worker may help you to resolve unanswered questions.

You should not feel obligated to accept a placement just because a visit has been made. One of the main concerns is that the placement be a positive experience for everyone involved.

Whenever a pre-placement visit or preparation is not possible because of an emergency, special effort should be made to help the child and the foster parents with the adjustment into the foster home.

PLACEMENT AS SEEN BY THE CHILD

The foster child's viewpoint of separation and placement is very important. Most children have predictable reactions to separation, and the first of these is a feeling of abandonment. Along with this comes a complete feeling of helplessness or lack of control over what is happening to him. Instead of facing these unacceptable feelings, he tries to deny them. In order to reassure himself he begins to believe the opposite - that he is responsible for all the things that have led up to this separation.

When he comes into placement with you, the foster child brings with him a whole set of ideas about family and his position in a family. During his stay with you he will be acting out much of this view of family. Since his biological family may have had numerous problems, the child's actions may be harmful to himself or upsetting to your family.

The first few weeks however may be quite peaceful as the child tries to please you and get acquainted with his new family and new surroundings. When the newness wears off he will be faced directly with his feelings of separation and abandonment. He is most likely to deal with the feelings in the same ways that he tried to cope with problems in his own family. His behavior, though hard to deal with, may be important in understanding his position within his family.

As foster parents you can expect these learned patterns of coping will recur from time to time. As the child adjusts to your family and becomes closer to you, he may feel guilt and anxiety because of this closeness. At this point he may re-establish his emotional distance by going back to the old patterns. Stress in his relationship with his biological family may also bring out the old patterns. By anticipating these recurring patterns it will be easier for you not to be disillusioned by them or feel inadequate because of them. Indeed these become the most opportune times for the child to learn new ways to deal with problems.

Your own feelings and those of your family will undergo changes as placement progresses. In the early days or weeks you, too, will be involved in getting acquainted with the child. As you become aware of the many adjustments you will need to make to care for the child, your

family will also bring out your favorite coping patterns. These patterns, such as "pulling together as a family", may be as distressful to the child as his behavior is to you. These periods of stress, when the child experiments with new ways of coping and watches you use a variety of means of coping, can be the most important learning times of this foster placement. You will need to be quite close to your social worker during these times in order to make the most of these opportunities.

All About Me

This card is provided to the foster child to keep a record of information pertinent to him or her.

SRS-CSD 22
(New 1/84)



ALL ABOUT ME

NAME: _____ / /
(BORN)

MEDICAID NO: _____

PLACEMENT DATE: _____

SOCIAL WORKER: _____

HOME: _____

OFFICE: _____

SUPERVISOR: _____ HOME: _____

DOCTOR: _____ HOME: _____ OFFICE: _____

HOSPITAL: _____ PHONE: _____

DENTIST: _____ OFFICE: _____

SCHOOL: _____

PHONE: _____

EMERGENCY NUMBER: _____

SOME HINTS TO SMOOTH THE ROAD

Receive the child quietly. You may want to have some kind of welcome to celebrate his arrival, but spare him. He is already self-conscious and confused. Extra social demands should be avoided. Settle down to a regular routine as quickly as possible.

Respect his feelings for the past. Do not probe. If he wants to talk, let him. Let him know the door is open and that you accept the fact that his past has been different. Don't deny his feelings.

Respect his loyalty to his own home. His own parents are important. Criticizing them may only serve to damage his already shaken self-concept and identity, and will inevitably make him turn against you. Don't try to take the place of the biological parent in his heart.

Avoid frustrations. Threats of "I'll send you back home" or "I'll tell your worker" are too easily used in moments of frustration or irritation. The child has already lost one home, so do not threaten

him with losing another. Since a foster child's need is to belong, he is particularly sensitive to any sign that another child in the family is more favored. You must not only make sure that one child is not discriminated against, but that he does not feel discriminated against either.

Impose rules gradually. Homes vary widely in what they expect of a child with regard to such things as table manners and language. Manners which may seem crude in one home may be taken for granted in another. Rules of cleanliness and the correct care of possessions, which you take for granted, may be something the foster child has never experienced. Before you scold the child, be sure you understand what has been expected of him in the past and that he understands what you want or expect of him now. Do not nag. Help him accept the new rules gradually. You will know he is responding when he first offers to help, when he reaches for your hand, or shares a happy experience.



A question which usually confronts foster parents is what the foster child should call you. Some children particularly older children may not be able to use words that suggest that their own parents are being replaced. The child should always feel free to call you whatever is easiest for the child. With time, the child will call you whatever seems right to him. You might help him through this period by saying something like, "You may not know what to call me but some of the children have called me _____"!

Help the child get to know your home and to feel comfortable by sharing with him some information about his new home and foster family.

FAMILY CONTACTS

When discussing biological parents and visitation, we can usually make three basic assumptions:

--There is a strong emotional involvement between the foster child and his/her parents and family.

--There will be and should be contacts between biological parents and children.

--Most children will be returning home to live.

Because we are usually dealing with families with multiple problems, including conflict, emotional illness, alcoholism and child abuse, the above assumptions are not always obvious. We can, however, understand why visitation is encouraged. Visitations sometimes cause problems, but they are generally an essential part of the treatment plan.

All arrangements for visits should be planned and approved by the foster parents, the social worker and



the biological parents. Biological parents have a right to periodic visits with their children (unless the court order indicates otherwise). Social workers have the responsibility of coordinating the time and appropriate place, and supervising the visits, if necessary.

Foster parents are under no obligation to accept unplanned visits by parents and should report such visits to the social worker for proper attention.

DON'T FORGET TO ASK

Foster parents often wish they had asked more questions before accepting a child into their home. The checklist below is designed to assist you in your discussion with the placing agency. Some of this does not apply to emergency placements.

1. Why is this child being placed?
2. What are the previous placement experiences of the child?
3. What is the child's legal status?
4. What is the family situation; parents' names?
5. What is the plan for the child? Expected length of placement?
6. Will there be pre-placement visits?
7. What is the child's understanding of why he has moved/separated from parents?
8. Where are the parents?
9. Will the parents visit? Where? How often?
10. Are there brothers/sisters and where are they? Birthdates?
11. When will the social worker visit or call?
12. What should I do about possible conflicting personal requests of the foster child, like having her ears pierced or not wanting to have his or her hair cut?
13. Is the child in good health? Allergies, immunizations, medications, dental care, last dental check-up.
14. When was the last physical?
15. What is the child's medical number?
16. What is the religious background of the child and the level of importance in the child's life?
17. What grade is the child in at school? What school?
18. Are there school problems?
19. Does the child have any special behavior problems or unusual habits?
20. Will there be a clothing allowance? Does the child have enough clothing?
21. What will make the child feel most at home (food, likes and dislikes, favorite toys, etc.)?
22. What is the maintenance rate? When can I expect to get paid?
23. If there is an emergency after office hours, who can I call?
24. What are your (social worker) expectations of me (foster parent)?

MOVEMENT OF A FOSTER CHILD

MOVEMENT OF A FOSTER CHILD

Circumstances surrounding a child's movement from a foster home will vary. The following basic principles should govern the situation:

Highest priority must be placed on the well-being of the child. This is not always evident, since the move may be a difficult one for the child. Perhaps your foster child doesn't want to return to a home situation which still has problems. This makes it all the more difficult for you, the foster parent.

Since you have a primary relationship with the child, you will have responsibility for helping the child to understand and accept the move.



A positive attitude is important. Both your verbal and nonverbal behavior convey your feelings to the child. Your acceptance of the plan will be very helpful and reassuring, and here again there must be a team effort in working toward what is best for the child.

A foster child may move from your home for several reasons:

--to return to their biological family;

--the foster family situation has changed, so they are unable to continue providing care;

--the child's behavioral/emotional difficulties are so severe he requires more structured residential placement;

--the foster child refuses to remain in the foster home, despite intervention;

--the child moves on to independent living;

--the social worker decides it is not the most appropriate placement for the child; or

--other circumstances.

RETURN OF THE CHILD TO HOME

Return home should be preceded by preplacement visits. You and the social worker will both be very involved in the movement process and will want to work closely together to insure its success.

Your ideas and suggestions are welcome. You have an intimate assessment of the situation and have much to contribute. The agency social worker can furnish the perspective and objectivity provided by a more distant and detached viewpoint.

Your interest in a foster child who has left your home is understandable, and, if possible, the social worker will keep you informed of the child's progress. It may be possible to have continued contacts with the child. You can discuss this with the social worker.

Termination

The steps in terminating a placement must be as carefully planned as for the initial placement in your home. Foster parents need to make every effort not to insist on immediate removal of a child from the home except for the most compelling reasons. Sudden movement from your home can be just as confusing for your foster child as sudden movement from his own home. He may have some of the same fantasies of being "bad" and "unwanted".

If you cannot keep the child or properly care for him, immediately notify Social and Rehabilitation Services or the supervising agency so that they will be able to make other plans for the child. You will need to allow Social and Rehabilitation Services or the placing agency adequate time (min-72 hrs) to arrange alternate placement of the child.

Separation is a very traumatic experience for both child and foster parents. The child needs as much support from the foster parents as possible, as he is likely to view the termination process as a rejection. Thus, there is a double burden placed upon the foster parents - separation from one you most likely have grown to love, and support of that separation. Whenever the plan is to terminate a placement, whether it be for the child to return home or for him to enter another substitute care situation, it is best for foster parents to allow the child to express his or her feelings about the move. If negatives are stressed or if the foster parents encourage apprehension, the planning will likely result in failure.

This is viewed by many as the most difficult aspect of foster parenting and certainly requires the utmost in understanding, courage and skill.

PROVIDING CARE FOR THE FOSTER CHILD

PROVIDING CARE FOR THE FOSTER CHILD

Discipline

The purpose of discipline is to help a child understand the positive and negative consequences of his actions and to teach him to become more aware that he has in most circumstances the responsibility and ability to control the results of his actions. A joint discussion between you and the social worker about the appropriate discipline and management plan for each foster child is helpful. Discussions should be held at the time of the initial placement as well as during the child's stay in your home.

Here are some guidelines to help you determine effective discipline for a child:

--Consider the child's age and level of social, intellectual and emotional maturity. Discipline should be appropriate to the child's age, needs and development level.

--You, as foster parents, and the child need to talk and listen to one another for an understanding of how the other thinks and feels.

--Establish definite limits and guidelines for the child's behavior and let him know he will have to assume the consequences of any behavior outside these guidelines.

--Explain to the child the reason for disciplinary action.

--Physically controlling a child may be necessary when a child's behavior demands immediate control in order to protect himself, other individuals or property. Assistance should be summoned to deal with the situation immediately.

The licensing rule on discipline in Montana's foster care rules reads:

(1) The foster parent(s) must be able to show evidence of ability to work with children without recourse to physical punishment or psychological abuse and must be positive in their approach to discipline.

(2) Any discipline or control must be appropriate to the child's age and development level.

(3) No child in care shall be subjected to unusual, severe, cruel, capricious, humiliating or unnecessary punishment.

(4) Foster parents shall not punish children for bed wetting or actions in regard to toilet training.

(5) No child in care shall be subjected to verbal abuse, sexual contact or abuse, derogatory remarks about himself or members of his family or threats to expel the child from the foster home.

(6) No child shall be deprived of meals, mail or family visits as a method of discipline.

(7) Children must not be placed in a locked room.

(8) Participation or nonparticipation in the religious activities of the foster family shall not be used as a form of discipline.

(9) Medication shall never be used to discipline or threaten children.

(10) A report shall be completed and sent to the placing agency by any foster parent involved in physical punishment.

School

A child of school age will be enrolled in school. It is the social worker's responsibility to collect the needed information such as past school records and documents for admission.

The foster parents may be expected to fill the parenting role for the child in school, but whenever feasible, the biological parent(s) should be involved. Some examples of activities are checking on homework, signing various requests, report

cards, etc., attending and sharing in school functions and PTA. Foster parents shall inform the social worker of all progress or special problems the child encounters during his school year.

The social worker should be contacted if the school asks for information about the child's background, or questions about previous schooling which you do not know about. Truancy, behavioral problems, and special educational needs require that the social worker, foster parents, biological parents and the school personnel be involved in their solution.



Scholarships may be available for foster children who wish to continue their education past the secondary level. For more information, contact the child's social worker or school guidance counselor.

Hot Lunch Program - For information refer to the Financial Section of this Handbook.

Emergency Communication Procedures

In the case of an emergency, foster parents have the right and responsibility to call their social worker, anytime--day or night. If you cannot contact your social worker, you should call the supervisor or the next appropriate person.

Emergencies would be:

1. If the child is seriously ill and needs medical care, in case of accidents, and cases where hospitalization becomes necessary.
2. If a child leaves your home without your permission.
3. If the child gets into serious trouble with the school, the police, the juvenile court, or anyone else.
4. If anyone, including the child's parents, tries to take the child from your home without the social worker's permission.

You should have readily available, the office and home telephone numbers of the social worker as well as the supervisor and an alternate number in cases where neither person is available. If you don't have these numbers, ask your social worker for them.

If at all possible, call your social worker during office hours.

Out-of-Town Trips

Foster parents are encouraged to include foster children in vacation plans and outings. As a team member, foster parents need to include the social worker in their planning as a courtesy to the worker and the biological parents and to avoid legal complication. When out-of-town trips of more than a weekend or out-of-state trips of any duration are planned by foster parents, the trip must be discussed with the social worker ahead of time.

When you plan to leave the state, the agency must provide you with written authorization to take the child and to obtain emergency medical care if needed. Since written authorization must be issued by the agency, one week prior notice is requested.

Personal Property

All articles that a child brings into the foster home at the time of his initial placement are very important to him. Regardless of the condition, appearance, or cost of these articles, the foster parents should not criticize or devalue them. If they are potentially dangerous or detrimental to the child's well-being and you do not know what to do call your social worker.

A child will need space to call his own, where he can keep his personal belongings.



It is important that the child is aware of what is considered his, such as, in which drawer or part of the closet he can put his belongings.

It is important that the child has the opportunity to send and receive mail from his biological parents and outside friends. These should be respected as the child's private property and should not be opened or read by the foster parents except at the child's request. If foster parents are suspicious about the child's mail, this should be discussed with the social worker.

Clothing

Clothing and personal possessions contribute significantly to the child's feeling of worth and dignity. Children should be encouraged to be proud of themselves and the way they dress.

Some things to keep in mind:

--Give younger children a voice in selecting their clothing and in what they wear.

--Permit older youngsters to make many of their own decisions in the purchase of clothing and in what they wear.

--Give reasonable acceptance to the current fads in clothing. Generally no child should dress too differently from his peers.

--Try to see that every child has some articles of new clothing that have either been made or purchased as his own.

--Try to see that no gift items are presented to the child that are not truly his and cannot be taken with him when he leaves.

When a child leaves your foster home, he should have with him all the usable clothing which has been purchased for him, as well as other personal possessions of value to him.

Religion

The policy on religious training for foster children is flexible and adaptable to each individual child's needs. All children in foster care shall have the opportunity to voluntarily practice their religion.

Choice of denomination and the degree of involvement in church activities is a personal one for every individual. A foster child may not be baptized without the consent of his biological parents or his social worker.

If a child has been placed with a foster family of the same religious denomination as that of his biological family, there is generally no problem. However, when the child and the foster family are of different faiths it is important that the matter is discussed and an agreement is reached on where or if he will attend church. This discussion should involve the child, biological parents, foster family and social worker.

Generally, if the child is quite young he will attend church with the foster family. If the child is older he should be involved in the decision making as to what church he will attend, if any.

Gifts

Many times the occasion arises (birthday, Christmas, Easter, graduation, etc.) when gifts are given to foster children in your home. It is important that such gifts be given with no strings attached. Let your foster child know the gift is his and can be taken with him when he leaves.

Likewise, if large toys or sporting equipment are purchased for the use of all foster children in your home, it is important that the child understand these are to be used only during the time he is placed in your home.



Driving

Questions about a teenage foster child taking driver education, obtaining a driver's license, or using the family car should be discussed on an individual basis with the social worker. If you sign a license permit, then you are held responsible for the child's driving endeavors. Sometimes children who drive a foster parent's car may take responsibility by helping to assume the additional payments for car insurance. The only protection you have against risk is your own auto insurance. This is not covered by the state's foster parent insurance policy.

Medical Care

When a medical emergency arises, it is expected that the foster parents will immediately seek professional medical care for the child and contact the social worker as soon as possible.

Foster parents have the overall responsibility for the day-to-day health of the children placed under their care since they are in the best position to observe the child and his needs on a daily basis. The agency, represented by the social worker, has responsibility for assisting the foster parents in assuring proper attention to health needs.



Most foster children are covered under the Medicaid Assistance Program. An identification card will be sent to you for the child. There may be a delay between placing a child with you and your receipt of the medical card, however, the child should be taken to a doctor for a physical exam within 30 days of placement. Ask the social worker for a temporary Medicaid card to be used until you are issued a permanent card.

Always have the child's Medicaid card with you when taking the child for treatment or when obtaining prescriptions. In some instances, physicians, dentists or pharmacists do not accept Medicaid cards, so inquire in advance when making appointments or filling prescriptions.

A foster parent should never be responsible for medical expenses. If you find some medical needs of the foster child are not being met, contact your social worker.

If the need arises for surgical or any major medical care, it is required that the social worker or supervisor be contacted. In most cases the biological parents must agree to any surgery. As foster parents you cannot sign for any major medical care. Please discuss this matter with your social worker and verify who may sign for medical consent. This is very important.

The biological parents or the agency is the authorized person to sign for medical attention or surgery.

Life Story Book

Ideally, children in placement would have records containing everything of importance in their lives. Children's pasts are a part of them, and children's feelings about what has happened color the way in which they view the world. Links with the past -- stories about things they did as children; pictures of themselves with pets or friends; trips to visit places they used to live -- all help give children a sense of their own history and identity.



For many children who have been in a series of foster homes, memories are sometimes painful. Children often recall events which they do not fully understand. For children who have been placed in a series of foster homes, many links with their cultures and their pasts have become dim and obscure. It is important to assist children in unraveling and understanding what happened to them and giving them permission to express feelings about these events.

One of the most helpful tools in getting to know the child and in helping her/him to understand birth family and foster family issues is the Life Story Book.

The easiest time to begin a Life Story Book is as a child enters the child care system when information about birth, developmental and family history are readily available.

It is never too late to start a life book. Ideally, foster parents can be involved in the process. Foster parents are often a rich source of a child's history. There is no "right way" to help a child begin to piece together the information into a personal life record. We must be sensitive to the areas that are of most interest to the child and proceed from there.

It is also important to decide what means of communicating is easiest for the child. Some children can work easily in a visual and verbal manner, both hearing and expressing information clearly. Other children need to form visual experience with verbal explanations. Regardless of the child's preferred style of communication, it is important that there be a written record at the end of the process.

Making a Life Story Book:

1. can help the foster parent and child to form an alliance,
2. can help a child understand events in his/her past,
3. can provide tangible links to the past which provide chronological continuity,
4. provides a vehicle for the child to share his/her past with others,
5. can increase a child's self-esteem by providing a record of the child's growth and development, and
6. helps others understand the child's past and her/his uniqueness.

A place to begin may be with factual information about the child's birth and facts that are known about the child's infancy. You might have a child draw a picture of the favorite teddy bear he/she used to take to bed. Information such as this that elicits visual memories is helpful.

Here is a checklist of some things that foster parents include in a child's life book:

- information about injuries, illnesses or hospitalizations
- favorite activities
- favorite birthday and Christmas gifts
- information about ways the child celebrated special holidays
- favorite friends
- information about pets in the family
- information about ways the child showed feelings
- pictures of the foster home
- pictures of the child with the foster family
- cute "naughty" behaviors
- ways the child liked to show affection
- special trips or vacations with the foster family
- information about reactions and frequency of visits with birth relatives
- any special extended family members
- names of teachers and school attended
- report cards
- special activities such as scouting, clubs, camping experiences, Church and Sunday School experiences.

In addition, photographs, drawings by the child and copies of documents such as birth certificates and report cards can all be combined in a life book. If information about developmental milestones such as the date of the first tooth or the first

step is available, it should be incorporated. Names of teachers and schools attended help record grade school and high school memories.

Information about specific family members, pets, and moves are particularly useful in helping the child organize memories of the past.

Many adults have a tendency to try to reassure children when they are feeling pain, sadness, or anger. It is very important when working on the Life Story Book with a child not only to hear the child's pain but also be accepting of the depth of the pain. We must accept the fact that children have very intense feelings. Those feelings will not disappear with reassurances.

Anger, sadness and despair are normal, appropriate responses to loss. Children frequently cry or feel angry. When children are allowed, even helped to express their feelings instead of storing them up, the feelings somehow seem less overwhelming and gradually assume more manageable proportions on a day-to-day basis. The Life Story Book is a very good tool in helping children in this process.

There is no right or wrong way to create a Life Story Book. Use cloth, construction paper, scrapbooks, photo albums, whatever materials are convenient. If you don't have photos available, use pictures from magazines, books, or use your own artistic talent. It is important to remember this is the child's book and she/he should be included in developing it. Every child should leave foster care with a Life Story Book. Talk to your social worker about initiating one and enlist her/his assistance in compiling information.

THE LEGAL ISSUES

LIMITATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

A child is considered to be abused or neglected if the child's normal physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the act or omission of his/her parent or custodian. Harm includes physical or mental abuse, sexual abuse, failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, education or health care, or abandonment of the child.

Any person who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child may be an abused or neglected child may report the matter to the county welfare department for investigation. While any person may report suspected child abuse and neglect, certain professionals and officials are required by law to report, including school officials, doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers, and foster care providers and social workers.

Once a report has been made, child protective services must investigate the report. If it is found that the child is in danger, the department must take action to protect the child.

If the child is in immediate or apparent danger, the social worker may immediately remove the child and place the child in foster care. If the child is not returned within 2 working days of placement in foster care, the social worker must file a petition with the court requesting further authority or obtain written permission from the parent to continue foster care.

Temporary Investigative Authority (TIA)

The most common petition used in initiating a dependency and neglect proceeding is a Petition for Temporary Investigative Authority and Protective Services. This petition



requests that the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) be granted certain authority over the child and the child's parents to obtain information for evaluating what should be done for the child.

In order to obtain a TIA, the worker must show the child is in danger of being abused or neglected. Usually, the TIA grants to the department the right to obtain medical and psychological evaluations of the child and his/her parents, the right to require counseling and the right to place the child in foster care. These rights are granted by the judge and are subject to the parents' right to appear before the court and contest the order.

The granting of a TIA does not change the "legal" custody of the child and limits the parental rights only as specified in the court order. Because the biological parents have certain fundamental rights concerning their children, they retain all rights not specifically limited by the court order. The parents have the right to be involved in all major decisions concerning the child's life.

Temporary Legal Custody

If after investigation it appears that the child is an abused or neglected child and that his/her best interests require that the legal custody of the child be transferred from the biological parents to SRS, the social worker may petition the court for temporary legal custody. If it is determined that the child is abused or neglected and that his/her interests would be served if SRS were granted legal custody for a temporary period, the court will so order. As the temporary legal custodians of the child, SRS assumes the responsibility for the care and maintenance of the child. SRS then delegates the day to day responsibilities to a foster family home or other youth care facility.

While the court has limited the biological parents' right to the custody and companionship of the child, the biological parent retains all rights not limited by the court. The transfer of custody is usually intended to be temporary. Temporary custody is long enough for the parent to make the needed changes to allow the child to return home. What will be required of the biological parent is usually set forth in a written treatment plan between the parent and SRS which is approved by the court.

Permanent Legal Custody & the Termination of Parental Rights

If the parents cannot or will not comply with the requirements of the treatment plan and it is in the best interests of the child to terminate the parent-child legal relationship, SRS may seek permanent legal custody of the child. This is the most drastic legal remedy available to the department and is used in those cases where the parents are: (a) unfit and unable or unwilling to provide adequate care for the child, and (b) it is in the child's best interest to be adopted by a new family or placed in a permanent placement. The transfer of permanent legal custody to SRS necessarily involves the permanent termination of the parental rights of the parents.

Once the parents' rights are terminated by court order, the parents are relieved of all rights and responsibilities regarding the child. The department assumes full responsibility of the biological parents once permanent legal custody is awarded to the department.



Voluntary Foster Care Placement

The previous paragraphs describe the system for involuntary proceedings for the protection of neglected or abused children. In addition to these involuntary court proceedings, a biological parent may voluntarily request that his/her child be placed in foster care. This is usually accomplished by the signing of a written foster care placement contract or agreement whereby the parent allows SRS to provide foster care to the child for a period of up to six months. Placement by voluntary agreement may be terminated at any time by the request of the biological parent. If the department feels it is potentially dangerous to return the child to the family, the department may petition the court for a TIA, temporary legal custody or permanent legal custody.



Under a voluntary placement, the parent continues to have rights and responsibilities and should participate in plans for education, medical care, religious training, employment, application for driver's license and for hunting and fishing license, etc.

Foster Care Review

The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services encouraged the Montana state legislature to establish Foster Care Review Committees (FCRC). These FCRC's afford each child in foster care a permanent plan which assures that child's right to stability and continuity of a family. Each FCRC is intended to encourage a reduction of the numbers of children in foster care, to expediently return children to their biological parents, or to free the children for alternative permanent placement.

Those children in foster care whose placement shall be reviewed by the FCRC include any child who (a) has been placed in foster care for a period of six months or longer and (b) who is placed under supervision of SRS, (c) who is placed by SRS, or (d) who SRS pays for the care of the child. All children who meet these conditions will be reviewed by the FCRC within six months of the initial placement date and within each six months thereafter as long as the child remains in placement.

The foster parent(s) of the child in care is an automatic member of the FCRC for review of that child. Foster parents whose child(ren) is/are reviewed by the FCRC will be notified in writing that they are members of the FCRC for the review of the child living in their care. The notification shall include time and place of the meeting and the responsibilities of the foster parent(s) on the committee.

It is very important for the child's success in placement that the foster parents actively participate as members of the FCRC. If you have a foster child placed in your home who meets the conditions mentioned above, and if you have not been notified of the time and place of the FCRC meeting to review your foster child's placement, please contact your social worker.



Child Abuse in Foster Care

Children who are in foster care can be demanding children. They can bring an extra set of stresses that put the foster family in a position to be more likely to abuse them. They may even look for abuse because they have been used to being abused and relate that to being loved.

Foster families need to be aware that child abuse can occur. It must be reported if it happens in their home or the home of another foster parent. Foster parents are mandated by state law to report suspected abuse and neglect.

Foster parents may at times find themselves on the verge of abusing a child in some way, if that happens they should contact the placing and/or licensing worker immediately regarding their concerns.

Foster parents should remember that the reason they became foster parents was to help children and when they have knowledge about abuse occurring either in their own or other foster parents homes, they need to help the child by reporting the abuse.

Administrative Procedures/Fair Hearing

If a foster parent's license is restricted, denied, suspended or revoked and the foster parent feels the action is unwarranted, s/he has the right to request a fair hearing before the independent hearings officer. The hearing officer will listen to both sides of the case and make a decision according to the rules, regulations and policies of the Department.

Likewise, a foster parent who is the subject of any adverse action of SRS concerning the provision of the monthly payment or other services may seek an administrative review/fair hearing if they disagree with the action. Be sure that the agency spells out adverse actions in writing.

The request for a fair hearing shall be made within 90 days after the foster parent receives notice from the agency of the adverse action.

THE TEAMWORK CONCEPT

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At a time of stress, each of us attempts to draw nearer to people, especially those close to us! Entering foster care is a life event for a child and, therefore, produces stress for the child. The purpose of the teamwork concept is to maximize possible benefits of the foster care experience and minimize the level of stress for the child. Teamwork should help to form a more harmonious relationship among the foster parent, the biological parent and the social worker.

The teamwork concept brings together all of the "workers": the foster parent, the biological parent, and the social worker. Together, goals can be set for the child and the various tasks assigned within the team. By simply sharing, the team can eliminate several potential conflict areas:

1. the feelings of the biological parent to compete with the foster parent are reduced;
2. the child can gain a feeling of being not only in a safe place, but also a growing place for the child and his/her family.
3. the social worker loses potential adversaries and obtains important allies;
4. there is a shift from finding fault to assessing family needs;
5. the family needs become goals for the professional foster care team;
6. the sharing of information takes place openly, at team meetings, and can then be aimed at the goal(s) set by the team; and
7. the child can more easily make a positive adjustment into the foster

home and a return to his/her family home.

When age and reason allow, the child should be encouraged to work as a team member. The child, the biological family and the foster family deserve respect and consideration.

The essence of the team work concept is simple, since we are deeply involved in the foster care experience, let's work together. Social and Rehabilitation Services and supervising agencies shall recognize foster parents as a professional extension of the agency and a vitally important component of the treatment plan for the foster child.

Work to improve any problematic situation implies that there are certain responsibilities.

THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

The parent, foster parent and social worker have the key responsibility of working together to meet the need of the child and his/her family. This necessitates forming goals and devising a plan to accomplish the goals. The team also has the responsibility for maintaining confidentiality and for mutual sharing of past and present information in an open cooperative manner. The team will want to examine the total environment of the child's past and present so that together we can plan for the future.

Responsibilities of the Social Worker/Placing Agency

As members of the professional team working to benefit the foster child, the social worker has the following responsibilities.

1. Assess the needs of the family and the child and develop an appropriate plan for the child.

2. Work with the biological parents toward the ultimate goal of reuniting the child with the biological family whenever possible. If such a goal, over time, proves to be unsuccessful, the social worker must develop an alternative permanent plan for the child.

3. Be available to the biological parents, foster parents and child for consultation and advice.

4. Provide for payment to the foster parent for the care provided to the child.

5. Provide information to the foster parents regarding the child's background, expected length of placement, special needs of the child, and legal status of the child.

6. Inform biological parents of resources available to assist them in overcoming the problems which led to the child being placed in foster care.

7. Provide foster parents with information regarding the licensing requirements, payments and other foster care policies.

8. Work closely with the foster child. Allow the child an opportunity to take an active part in planning for the future and participating as part of the team.

Responsibilities of Foster Parents

As members of the professional team working to benefit the foster child, the foster parents have the following responsibilities:

1. To include the child as a member of the family unit while giving recognition to the biological family's rights.

2. To work objectively with SRS or other placing agency to implement the particular plan for the child in their care and to express to the agency their feelings about the agency's policies and practices.

3. To abide by the licensing requirements of the agency.

4. To cooperate with any plan to reunite the family and to work with the biological parents to achieve this goal.

5. To cooperate and assist with parental visitation.

6. To communicate with the social worker and to provide information concerning any medical or behavioral problems observed, the educational progress of the child, and any other important information regarding the child's behavior while in foster care.

7. Keep personal information regarding the child and his/her biological family confidential.

8. Respect child's cultural traditions, ethnic background and religious beliefs.

Responsibilities of the Biological Parents

As members of the team working to benefit their child, the biological parents have the following responsibilities:

1. To work with the social worker in setting up the plan for the child.

2. To work toward solving the problems which prevent the child from living at home with them.

3. To visit the child regularly at the times and places agreed upon with the agency social worker.

4. To talk about the child's care and progress with the social worker and the foster parents.

5. To keep appointments with the social worker or the foster parents and to answer letters from the social worker or foster parents regarding the child.

6. To pay toward the cost of the child's care if able to do so.

7. To help the child make a positive adjustment to the foster home, until the time when the child can return home or other permanent plans are made for the child.

8. To cooperate with the schools, mental health and other community agencies that are involved with the child and family in resolving the family's problems.

Rights of Foster Parents

Along with the responsibilities above, foster parents have the following rights:

1. The right of involvement in all of the agency's crucial decisions regarding the foster child as team members, including the right to participate as a member of the Foster Care Review Committee regarding the review of their foster child's placement.

2. The right to decline a foster care placement.

3. The right to continue their own family patterns and routines.

4. The right to support from the social worker in assisting the foster parents in meeting the needs of the child by provision of the following:

a) Pertinent information regarding the child and his family.

b) Information regarding available resources for meeting the child's special needs.

c) Interviews between and among the social worker, the child, the biological parents and the foster parents.

5. The right to the opportunity to improve their skills through planned foster parent training sessions.

6. The right to reimbursement for the costs of the child's care according to the rates established by the placing agency.



Rights of Biological Parents

Along with the responsibilities above, the biological parents of a child in foster care have the following rights:

1. The right to all parental rights unless specifically limited through court proceedings.
2. The right to be involved in the planning for their child and to be consulted whenever a change in the plan is being considered.
3. The right to know what the placing agency expects them to do before the child is returned home.
4. The right to visit the child at the times and places agreed upon with the foster parents and social worker.
5. The right to be provided information regarding the child's health and development, progress in school and behavior while in foster care.
6. The right to have the child receive religious training if requested.
7. The right to approve surgery or serious medical care, if needed, by the child unless the parent cannot be reached in an emergency situation.
8. The right to be notified as soon as possible of any serious medical emergency and of any treatment provided to the child without the biological parent's consent.
9. The right to receive notice of and to attend any court action held about the child or about their parental rights.

Rights Of The Child

The rights of the foster child are best stated in the Bill of Rights for Foster Children, a proclamation which was ratified by the National Action for Foster Children Committee on April 28, 1973. In edited form, the Bill of Rights follows.



Bill Of Rights For Foster Children

1. Every foster child has the inherent right to be cherished by a family of his own, either his family helped by readily available services and supports to reassume his care, or an adoptive family or by plan, a continuing foster family.
2. Every foster child has the inherent right to be nurtured by foster parents who have been selected to meet his individual needs and who

are provided services and supports, including specialized education, so the child can grow in the ability to reach his potential.

3. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive sensitive, continuing help in understanding and accepting the reasons for his own family's inability to take care of him, and in developing confidence in his own self-worth.

4. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive continuing loving care and respect as a unique human being... a child growing in trust in himself and others.

5. Every foster child has the inherent right to grow up in freedom and dignity in a neighborhood of people who accept him with understanding, respect and friendship.

6. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive help in overcoming deprivation or whatever distortion in his emotional, physical, intellectual, social and spiritual growth may have resulted from his early experiences.

7. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive education, training and career guidance to prepare him for a useful and satisfying life.

8. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive preparation for citizenship and parenthood through interaction with foster parents and other adults who are consistent role models.

9. Every foster child has the inherent right to be represented by an attorney at law in administrative or judicial proceedings with access to fair hearings and court review of decisions, so that his best interests are safeguarded.

10. Every foster child has the inherent right to receive a high quality of child welfare services, including involvement of the biological parents and his own involvement in major decisions that affect his life.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Foster Care Payment Rates

Foster care payment rates are evaluated and set by the agency. The payments reimburse foster parents for expenses incurred in caring for foster children.

State Rates

Foster care payment rates established for care in a family foster home vary according to the age of the child.

The age ranges are: birth-12 years; and 13 years and over.

Any person can obtain information on the current payment rates at any time. Because there are frequent changes in the payment rates the current rates will not be printed in this handbook. The rates are available on request at any SRS office or other child placing agency.

Foster parents are entitled to payment for each full day beginning on the first day and each day thereafter. You will not be reimbursed for the last day of care.

Clothing Allowance

A child entering foster care with an inadequate wardrobe may have his initial clothing supplied through a special allowance. During placement activities you and the social worker will need to assess together the adequacy of the child's wardrobe.

Transportation Costs

Ordinary/occasional transportation is generally the responsibility of the foster parent. Unusual transportation costs should be discussed with your social worker.

Earnings of Children in Foster Care

The earnings of any child in placement who is supported by foster care payments are to be treated as follows:

--The agency may disregard all income of children under 14 years of age.

--The agency may disregard some of the income if the child is a full-time or part-time high school student.

If the child has completed high school, the question of further education and use of income is determined on an individual basis.

--A child who is employed full-time and is not in school or job training is expected to be able to provide for most, if not all, of his maintenance needs. For these children the earned income may be used to reduce the amount of the foster care payment.



Reduction of Payment For Absence

If your foster child's payments are made by SRS and the child is out of your home for 10 days or less under a plan which meets the approval of SRS, no reduction in your monthly

payment is required. If the child is gone for more than two weeks but not over a month under a plan that does not involve payment of board, the payment will be reduced by the days of absence or else the payment will be terminated.

Be sure to discuss with your social worker any interruption in the foster care placement.

Allowances

A regular personal allowance may be provided to help a child learn about the appropriate use of money and to develop skills in money management. Handling of these allowances depends on the age and maturity of the child. Amounts should be related to a child's specific recreational activities, school and church contributions, and personal grooming. The amount should also follow family and community patterns of providing allowances. Be sure the child understands how much he is to receive and what expenses it is expected to cover. Then be certain he receives what is promised to him at regular intervals. This money comes out of the regular monthly foster care payment.

Income Tax

Tax laws do vary from year-to-year, thus it would be advisable that you contact your local Internal Revenue Service before filling out your income tax return. As a general rule, you should not have to declare foster care payments (state rate) as income.

Medical Costs

Every child in foster placement is eligible to receive medical care. Be sure to know the provisions for medical care when the child is placed. Licensing rules require that the child receive a complete

physical examination within 30 days after admission to foster care and annually thereafter. A child who has not had a dental examination within a year prior to placement shall have a dental examination within 90 days of placement.

The foster parent and social worker should discuss the health of the child during the pre-placement conference. The social worker is responsible for initiating this discussion, as it is imperative that the foster parents have full knowledge of the needs of the child.

At the current time financial pre-authorization for medical, dental, optical or hospital care is necessary. If providers of these services require authorization other than the Medicaid card, the social worker should be contacted to secure whatever authorization is necessary. Sometimes, you may use the doctor or dentist of your choice; however, the decision rests with the social worker. In some cases you may want to continue with the child's doctor if he has had or does have a serious medical problem.

In the case of an emergency, or for any medical attention, including regular physical examinations, dental work, eye examinations, glasses or drugs, you will need to present the child's Medicaid card. Be sure you have previously checked to be certain that the doctor, dentist or pharmacist accepts Medicaid.

Educational Costs

The foster child may be eligible for free or reduced price school lunches. The foster child is considered as a separate family of one if a social service agency has legal responsibility for him. The foster care payment is considered as the

income of that one-member family. If the annual income from the foster care payment is not above the income level for free or reduced price meals of a one-member family as set forth in the income guidelines as prescribed by the local school food authority, the foster child should receive the benefits to which he is entitled.

If a permanent foster care agreement has been signed or if the agency is subsidizing the adoption of your child, then the foster child will be considered as a member of your household. Your family size and total income will then be used to determine the child's eligibility for free and reduced price meals.

Generally you can obtain an application form and more information from your local school.

Other school costs such as books, activity tickets, and class projects, are part of the monthly payment rate. If you feel this rate does not cover the cost involved for special items and fees, please discuss it with your social worker.

Foster Parents Liability Insurance

The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services has purchased Liability Insurance on behalf of all licensed foster parents caring for a child. Information on the liability coverage is available from the Department.

Voucher Procedure For SRS Payment

Each month that you have a child in care it will be necessary for you to bill the Department to receive payment. Billing is done on an AD-58, Invoice Form. The Invoice Form and Instructions are available from your county or district SRS office.

For foster parents of other placing agencies, please discuss the payment procedure with your social worker.

FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATIONS

FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

Local Foster Parent Associations

Throughout the state there are many local foster parent associations on a county level.

Most county associations hold monthly meetings and invite speakers to talk and to show films on topics of interest to all foster parents. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity for foster parents to meet each other and offer support and suggestions regarding mutual concern, problems and satisfactions. Generally, a social worker from the county office attends and perhaps assists in planning these meetings.

Your participation in these associations is strongly encouraged. Check with your social worker as to what is available in your county and area.

MONTANA STATE FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

The purpose of this non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-profit organization is:

1. To establish a progressive state organization, bringing together all persons interested in foster children and the total foster care program.
2. To provide better coordination and communication between the foster parent organization, foster parents, biological parents and all child placing agencies, public and private;
3. To encourage training and education for foster parents and social workers.
4. To advance the interests of foster children through community awareness and cooperation.

5. To promote legislation which affects foster children and their parents, biological and/or foster.

It is the intent of the Montana State Foster Parents Organization (MSFPO) to assist and cooperate with all social services agencies in carrying out their duties.

Membership in MSFPO is open to any individual or family. Individuals or families who are licensed or approved foster homes are then voting members of the association. Individuals or families who are not foster parents, but who ascribe to the aims and purposes of the association, are associate members.

NATIONAL FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) is a unique organization that brings together foster parents, social workers, and other concerned advocates for children. NFPA is the only publicly supported organization devoting its sole efforts to the improvement of the quality of services to foster children, and it is the largest mass movement of volunteers for foster children in American history.

As a growing national organization, the NFPA provides leadership and services to foster parents and agencies to meet the continuing needs of foster children. NFPA serves as a national clearing house for information on foster care; it conducts research; it provides assistance to agencies and foster parent organizations; it works with other national and state organizations to seek viable policies affecting foster children.

The national and regional conferences, held yearly since 1971, have provided a responsible national forum for the education and training of hundreds of thousands of foster

parents and social workers. Many foster parents from Montana have attended these national and regional conferences held around the country. Membership in NFPA is open to all foster parents, social workers and interested individuals. For information on how to join, contact your Regional or State Foster Parents Association.

SCHOLARSHIP

The six states of Region VIII consisting of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado have combined efforts to grant a \$500 scholarship to a foster child for attending a school of his choice. This applicant must be in foster care at the time of application and shall be at least 16 years of age. Applications must be submitted on or before February 1, for scholarships that are granted for the next school year. Check with your foster parent association for more detailed information.

STATE SCHOLARSHIPS

Fund raising is done whenever possible to ensure that a minimum of at least one state scholarship a year is awarded in May-June. Contact the Montana State Foster Parent Organization for more information and application.

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